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Nick Johnson fights for 'radical' TV

By JOHN CAMPER
Chicago Daily News

U.S. broadcasting-industry executives celebrated when Nicholas Johnson left the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1973.

Johnson had annoyed them for the seven years he was on the commission with his "radical" — some might call them "un-American" — ideas. For instance, he had some people believing that a broadcasting licence should be something other than a license to make as much money as possible. And that the airwaves belong to the public and should be used in the public interest.

He said TV and radio stations should have more minority employees. And — get this — he said the stations and networks should try to enlighten the public, rather than just sell it the sponsors' products.

Unfortunately (for the U.S. industry), Nick Johnson has not quietly gone away. He intends to spend the next several years, and maybe the rest of his life, trying to improve radio and television.

He heads a group called the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, which likes to pressure stations at license-renewal time into doing things they'd rather not do.

Rather than wage a costly fight with Johnson's group every three years, some station executives have agreed to hire a few more blacks and women, run more public-interest programs on Sunday mornings and meet occasionally with local citizens who are not necessarily rich and powerful.

Prime time is the evening period each day when about half the nation normally is watching TV. It is when a 30- second commercial sells for around $60,000. It is the networks' showcase, the time of day when they run all their "best" programs, like Starsky and Hutch, Cher and Petrocelli.

Johnson's organization is enlisting the support of community groups — labor unions, PTAs, churches, League of Women Voters — to go to local station executives and suggest that if they wish to avoid a license challenge, they might consider devoting two hours of prime time a week to public-affairs programming. One hour could be provided by the network and one by the local station. For independent stations one hour a week would suffice.

My fearless prediction is that the broadcasting executives are not going to like this. Until a few years ago, they did schedule public-affairs programs regularly in prime time, and the programs consistently ran low in the ratings.

WINNER

In the 1970-71 season, ABC's Marcus Welby, M.D., would get almost 76 per cent of the viewing audience on the one night a month it ran opposite two public-affairs programs, CBS's 60 Minutes and NBC's First Tuesday.

Low ratings mean lower advertising revenues, but this bothers the broadcast executives a lot more than it bothers Johnson. He points out that if all stations were required to have an hour or two of public-affairs programming in prime time, no station or network would be hurt any more than another. And all would continue to make plenty of money.

"Commercial television is at best a neutral influence," he says. "It has the potential to help us with our problems, expand our minds and our imagination. Anyone who has the power to do good and doesn't do it is committing the greatest sin of all."

At the Eveche club

Octobre combines lyricism, rock

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Octobre is one of the new-wave Quebecois rock groups to recently emerge following the gigantic successes of Beau Dommage and Harmonium.

The quartet had actually been in existence before these two supergroups saw the light of day — but, as with many of their contemporaries, Octobre was relegated to the underground while the local solo stars made the hit parade.

Today, however, the audience for home-made rock has grown dramatically and at long last such outfits as Octobre are getting exposure — such as this week's engagement at the Eveche club of the Hotel Nelson.

Led by composer-pianist-singer Pierre Flynn, the group combines the passionate and tender lyricism of the chansonnier tradition with the hard-clinching rock sound. It's an interesting approach that remains Octobre's distinguishing feature — as well as its primary limitation.

Emotion

Surrounded by acoustic and electric pianos and synthetizer, Flynn plunks out chord structures that are almost as monotonous as they are strong, upon which he pours forth torrents of emotion. Unfortunately, the lyrics tend to wallow in their sense of drama, thus choking a true group sound in the duration.

When Octobre takes off on its solos, the music fares better. There are stretches when the musicians — including guitarist Jean Dorais, bassist Mario Legare, and drummer Pierre Rebert — ascend together in tough lyrical style, although other chunks are little more than stock phrases.

Octobre has promise, as revealed in Survivance, their forthcoming third album — but they would do well to develop a more musical character, instead of taking-off on Flynn's lyrics. The words attempt to "set-up" the music, but Flynn can only mask his vocal and songwriting limitations by adopting a portentious pose.

And that is not the mood of Octobre's music at its best.

Handled movie by herself, Elaine May sued by studio

NEW YORK — (Reuter) — Paramount Pictures is suing director Elaine May for $4.5 million, claiming she is trying to do too much with a film they financed for her.

Not only did Miss May write, direct and produce the film Mickey and Nicky, but she now is also planning to release it on her own without Paramount, the company claimed in a suit filed this week in Manhattan Supreme Court.

Justice Irving Kirschenbaum signed an order prohibiting May from removing the film from its present location or tampering with it in any way pending the outcome of the suit.

The company said May went over cost making the film and demanded $150,000 more to finish it. When the company refused, she accused it of breaching the agreement and abandoning production.

TV TODAY

CBFT (2) Montreal
WCAX (3) Burlington, Vt.
CBOT (4) Ottawa
WPTZ (5) Plattsburgh, N.Y.
CBMT (6) Montreal
CHLT (7) Sherbrooke
WMTW (8) Poland Spring, Me.
CJOH (9) Cornwall
(2) Cable TV
(6) Global TV, Ottawa
NC (2) Nat'l Cablevision
CBOFT (3) Ottawa
CFTM (10) Montreal
CKWS (11) Kingston
CFCF (12) Montreal
CJOH (13) Ottawa
CIVA (17) Montreal
WVNY (22) Burlington, Vt.
WETK (33) Burlington, Vt.

On the airwaves

8:03 p.m. (CBC-AM) Themes and Variations. A repeat of Wednesday's program on CBC-FM.

8:03 p.m. (CBC-FM) Ideas. Sex and Civilization Tonight: Virgin Queen/Bitch Goddess, myth and archetype.

9:00 p.m. (CBC-FM) Encore. A Dell's House, by Henrik Ibsen, adapted for radio by Marian Waldman.

10:30 p.m. (CBC-AM) Jazz Radio-Canada. The Bob Hales Band from New Westminster, and the Dave McMurdo Quintet from Toronto are featured tonight.

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